



TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING GRAMMAR AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Esbah Shakir Abdulla
College of Education-Samarra
Tikrit University

Introduction

Grammar is regarded as the core of language systems .That is, the grammatical system of every language is the most significant element in language learning. So you cannot learn a language without learning its grammar. (Rutherford, 1980: 60;Widdowson, 1992:334).

To teach grammar effectively should not be limited to the teaching of collection of rules. Rather, it is assumed to reflect the way the native speaker speaks and to become a positive factor for provoking the students' desire to learn.

Teaching grammar at the university level has proved ineffective because the objectives set behind teaching grammar are not adequately performed .To adopt an easy and an efficient textbook suitable to each stage can enrich the students' understanding and help them to use the language properly .

Discussion

The whole strategy process of learning and teaching rotates around the major methodological traditional approaches. The inductive form of teaching grammar by moving from implicit exposure to rules in terms of language use to developing rules or generalization. This process sounds like the natural acquisition of language in childhood. The second one which is the deductive form of teaching by moving from explicit statements of rules to their application in terms of training in practical instances.

In both cases of learning inductive and deductive, the learners are engaged in rule formation and use (Cunningsworth , 1984 : 32).By the first way of learning , from the instances exposed to the learners, they induce the rules and then use them .The second way explicates the process in reverse, the learners are presented with an explanation of the



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rules on analytical way and then they are asked to apply rules and produce new sentences according to those rules .

The best approaches to advocate the above assumptions are the Grammar-Translation and the Direct methods representing the deductive process of learning on one hand, and the structural, functional and communicative approaches representing the inductive one on the other hand.

Advocates of the first two approaches believe that language is basically a collection of rules governing a set of words or vocabulary items. In such a case, language mastery is thought to emphasize memorization of rules of grammar with lists of foreign words.

Advocates of the second tow approaches think that people use language symbols which reflect their view of nature. Grammar rules should be deduced by language users as a result of exposure to language forms. They also believe that rules discovered by the learners themselves are permanent and more meaningful than those delivered by a teacher or a textbook.

A Critical Study of the Grammar- Based Approaches

The grammar-based approaches are demonstrated here to elucidate their strong and weak points from the methodological point of view:

1-The Grammar–Translation Method

This approach which is the oldest and the most primitive technique of teaching foreign language focuses upon reading ability. It studies grammar as an aid to reading comprehension and a great amount of written translation has been described by theorists and teachers alike . It has failed to teach foreign languages efficiently since translation is a useless teaching device particularly in the first stage of learning a foreign language(Al-Hamash,1985:67).

Besides, it reflects an old-fashioned method by which the learners are trained in artificial forms of language learning . The outcome of a teaching task by this method has proved its failure for the nill-realization of the objectives set in the light of this approach . (for more details see Al-Bettar ,1965:20)



2-The Direct Method

Adherents of this method adopt the belief that the naturalists principles of learning a foreign language should be identical to those of children learning . It stresses that learning through direct exposure to foreign language environment leads to a natural acquisition as that of the mother tongue . (Lado ,1964 :56 ; 1977 : 4) . It excludes the native language of learners from the class where a foreign language is taught . Points of weakness of this approach can be summarized in the following:

1-The process of teaching may become complicated rather than being simplified by explaining the difficult vocabularies by the target language or by using expressions above the level of the learners , wasting a lot of time and effort .

2-Since reading is the main skill through which all other language activities are channeled, the teacher is the corner- stone of all activities .

3-The Structural Approach

By the advent of the modern structural linguistics at the very beginning of the 20th century , the structural school of grammar appeared in the twenties and thirties . It has concentrated on the notion of structure . Structuralist grammarians believe that the formal properties of structure are the only observable features which are subject to scientific analysis .

In this sense , language is thought of as a system of structurally related elements for the encoding of meaning. Its elements are: phonemes , morphemes , words , structures and sentences. So learning native or a foreign language is realized by a full mastery of these structural elements or building-blocks of the language rules by which these elements are combined . (see for more details Richard and Rogers , 1986 : 48 & ; Al Hamash & Younis , 1985:74)

The main points of weakness of the structural approach lie in that this approach rests upon techniques of memorization and drilling which take too much time to the extent of becoming boring . So learners are also unable to use perfectly memorized material in contexts . A heavy load is laid on the teacher for the preparation and organization of the material intended to be taught .



4-The Communicative Approach

The primary goal of this approach is to enable the student communicate using the target language . So most of the methodologists emphasize the acquisition of a foreign language by the acquisition of the linguistic structures and vocabularies. Hence the communicative approach emphasizes the role of structures and vocabulary despite its communicative nature, which rests upon the functional aspect of language.

The communicative approach makes a distinction between the linguistic and communicative competence. The former is associated with ‘usage’ whereas the latter with ‘use’. (See Hymes, 1972: 28; Chomsky, 1965: 6-8; Crystal, 1987: 70) .

The Communicative Approach can be criticized by the following drawbacks :

- 1-The learning situations of the native language and foreign language .
- 2-The children are exposed to real situations in which language is spoken naturally , while the learners miss much opportunity .
- 3-the amount of time of learning the native language is much more than that of the foreign language .

The Model Proposed for Teaching English Grammar

The essential factor that determine the successful teaching of any subject can be attributed to teacher’s personality , methods , teaching aids, student’s qualifications, readiness, motivation, teaching environment, emotional climate , etc. (Ericsson , 1986 : 22)

The task of teaching is effective when it leads to a desired standard of students’ performance. Although grammar is boring and deals with the world of abstraction, teaching grammar should be effective and fruitful. Teaching grammar at the university level might be on two stages. The first two years might imply the pedagogical grammar which is designed specifically for the purpose of learning and teaching process of a foreign language. (See, Crystal, 1987: 35)

The second two years might be allocated to theoretical and scientific grammar which talks about the language, its structure and



functions regardless of any practical applications. So grammar for the teaching of a language is not like that of written for linguists. Halliday et. al. (1964: 150)

Students at the university level may learn differently from younger learners. Hence it is recommended to encourage our students to discover the grammar of a foreign language by themselves. In this sense, heavy emphasis must be laid on the inductive method of learning rather than the deductive one .

Practically , authentic texts chosen from different resources of real situations in the target languages are given to the students and then they are asked to practice the language constantly under the supervision of the well-efficient and qualified teachers . This way of teaching will help the students learn and master the foreign language efficiently .

Sometimes , the teacher may resort to an eclectic approach in urgent cases for effective method and to save effort and time , since certain grammatical activities are best dealt with eclectically .

Conclusions & Recommendations

After the theoretical presentation of the material has been conducted , the researcher has arrived at the following points :

1-Lectures of teaching grammar is , to a great extent , described as theoretical rather than practical . So , pedagogical grammar with constant practice might be adopted in teaching English at the university level .

2-Pedagogical grammar is intended to develop the ability of learners to recognize and produce sentences in a foreign language.

Since poor achievement and weak performance of the graduates from English departments are diagnosed , the remedial solutions and alternatives are suggested in the following point:

1-Pedagogical grammar might be relevant to learner's needs and suitable to their stage .

2-The amount of time devoted for each lecture is not sufficient . That is why the number of lectures should be increased so that the students may have enough time to practice English.



3-The huge numbers of students crowded in the classroom stands a great obstacle in giving our student a good opportunity for learning a foreign language . I suggest according to our experience the ideal and practical number should not be more than fifteen students in all cases , in every classroom .

4-The preparation for every lecture is a must particularly on the part of the competent teacher so that the efficient teacher can present creative skills for stimulating the students intellectually .

5-Teaching grammar should be meaningful rather than to be mechanical or restricted to drilling only .

6-The strategy of learning English grammar should be changed so as to meet the objectives set and to perform the goals behind teaching grammar . To get down to the specifics , the recommended textbooks for every year in the college are suggested as follows :

1- 1st Year , English Grammar in Use . by Raymond Murphy with exercise book .

2-2nd Year , An Introductory English Grammar , by N. C. Stageberg with exercise book .

3-3rd Year , A University Grammar of English , by R. Quirk and S. Greenbaum from Ch. : 1-7 with its workbook by R.A.Close .

4-4th Year , a- A University Grammar of English , by R. Quirk and S. Greenbaum from Ch. : 7-14 for the first semester with its workbook by R.A.Close .

b- Introductory Transformational Grammar , by B. Liles for the second semester .



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